

Washington, DC (July 26, 2011) – Rep. Gus Bilirakis (FL-09), member of the Foreign Affairs Committee's Subcommittee on European Affairs and co-chair of the Hellenic Caucus, released the following statement after the House Foreign Affairs Committee passed H.R. 2583, the Foreign Relations Authorization Act for FY 2012:

"I am pleased that this bill included my language as it relates to Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Cyprus and the Ecumenical Patriarchate. This is a major step in the right direction for religious freedom and I look forward to it advancing to the House floor.

"The bill conditions the provision of U.S. assistance to the FYROM upon Skopje's willingness to engage in meaningful discussions with the government of Greece to resolve the ongoing dispute over what shall be its official name. It also prohibits the use of U.S. funding for any activities that support any hostile activities or propaganda by either the FYROM government or private entities, including educational materials that promote inaccuracies regarding the history and geography of Greece and FYROM.

"H.R. 2583 makes it the policy of the U.S. to support measures aimed at the reunification of Cyprus and requires the State Department to provide Congress with a detailed description of all assistance programs and activities that are funded by the U.S. to help the reunification efforts. Thirty-seven years after the illegal Turkish invasion and occupation of Cyprus, we still seek a reunified and prosperous Cyprus where Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots can live together in peace, security and stability.

"Finally, the bill calls upon Turkey to eliminate all forms of discrimination, particularly with regard to religion, and to immediately grant the Ecumenical Patriarchate appropriate recognition, which will allow it to perform its essential church functions such as: The right to ecclesiastic succession without interference, the ability to train clergy, and the opportunity to manage church finances and church property."